

# Building/Planning Guide

## Buying and Developing Property in Mono County

Mono County Community Development  
Department

Year 2001 Update

This guide is designed to assist you in working with the various County departments as you formulate plans for your new property. It includes information on zoning, building, and various types of permits that might be required as you proceed. Also included are answers to frequently asked questions and a glossary of useful acronyms you might encounter.



County staff is friendly as well as knowledgeable.

### Here are the people you'll be getting to know

#### Community Development Department

(Planning and Building)

P.O. Box 347

Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

(760) 924-5450 Planning

(760) 924-5451 Building

Minaret Village Mall

(second floor, above Giovanni's )

P.O. Box 8

Bridgeport, CA 93517

(760) 932-5217 Planning

(760) 932-5231 Building

Annex Building w/library

(first floor, near the middle, both sides of hall)

#### Environmental Health Department

P.O. Box 3329

Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

(760) 924-5454

Same as CDD above

P.O. Box 476

Bridgeport, CA 93517

(760) 932-7485

Old hospital on Twin Lakes Rd.

(south end of building)

#### Public Works Department

P.O. Box 457

Bridgeport, CA 93517

(760) 932-5252

Annex Building w/library

(second floor, stairs on both ends of building)

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### Special points of interest:

- Answers to Questions
- Building Permits
- Exceptions to the Rule
- Useful Acronyms

## Buying Property

So you have found a choice parcel, and now are envisioning improvements that reflect your personal touch. Everyone may know the property as the “old so-and-so place,” but specific information is needed before any building or development can take place. The Assessor’s Parcel Number is a unique designation for each piece of land. The APN is necessary to determine such information as zoning, setbacks, restrictions and natural hazards. These factors may come into play as you proceed with your plans for the property.

If you are fairly serious about buying, the next step will be to visit the Community Development Department to determine the General Plan designation. This will tell you if your proposed improvements will be possible. And it will tell you what you and your neighbors-to-be can do in the area, giving you an idea what the neighborhood will look like when built out.



When you find that dream property, here are the steps to take.

## Getting Under Way

Before you start fixing up your piece of property, keep reading this guide. Work done at this stage affects what you can do on the property later. Much of what you do from now on requires a permit and/or guidance from the County. These steps are here to help protect your health and safety, as well as your ability to sell the property in the future, if you so desire. Here are some common questions that new property owners ask, including who to talk to and what the costs might be:

**Is it OK to live in our camper or motor home?** Mono County Code prohibits anyone from living in a camper, camp trailer, or motor home on private property. The only exception is someone who has pulled a Building Permit and received a special permit from the Planning Division.

**Can I drill a well?** This procedure takes a well permit from the Environmental Health Department. The basic permit costs \$200 per well. You or the well drilling company can pick up an application in person, or have it mailed to you. The well permit assures compliance with all relevant state regulations.

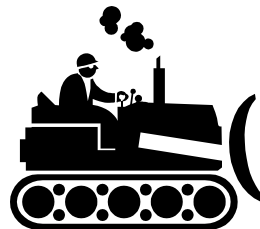
**What if water and sewer hookups are already in place?** If the property is in a developed area with public water and sewer hookups in place, your Realtor or the County office staff can tell you how to contact the local public utilities district for that area. No Health Department permits are needed for such parcels, as the Health Department will sign off all buildings hooked into existing public systems.

**Can I install a septic tank and leach lines?** Once again, the monitoring agency is the Environmental Health Department. Health Specialists will help make sure that the placement and

design are adequate to protect against health hazards in future years. The average cost of a permit for a standard system is \$200. Soil conditions vary in Mono County, so you might be required to take such steps as percolation testing or providing alternative designs of leach fields.

**“These steps are here to help protect your health and safety, as well as your ability to sell the property in the future, if you so desire.”**

**Can I clear brush or move dirt around?** Because of the contour and location of some pieces of property, it is often necessary to level, cut, fill or clear areas of the lot. These activities fall under the control of a Grading Permit issued by the Public Works Department. The types of areas that require a permit are too numerous to mention here, but they are listed on the Grading Permit application. So pick up an application from Public Works and review it prior to beginning any work. Grading Permits start at around \$100 and go up with the size and cost of the job. Always check with Public



*A Grading Permit application lists work that require a permit.*

Works before starting any clearing or dirt moving, as it could save you time and money later. An example would be the compaction test required if you are going to build where you have filled in soil.

**Are there any regulations about driving onto my property?** An Encroachment Permit is needed to connect a property to an existing road. If the property is located on a state highway, contact Caltrans at (760) 872-00601. If it is on a street or County road, call the Public Works Department. An Encroachment Permit requires a \$600 deposit, with \$500 returned when the property passes inspection. The \$500 is used as a bond to cover costs in case Public Works has to complete the work or construct a proper access. You have one year to complete the encroachment.

**How do I hook up to utilities?** For electrical service from Bridgeport south, call the Southern California Edison office closest to you (see the phone book). In the Antelope Valley, contact Sierra

Pacific.

Once you know where you will hook into the system, check with the Community Development Department for guidelines. The General Plan calls for all utility lines to be placed underground. Mono County encourages the use of alternative energy sources such as wind and solar power, so check the requirements and possible bonuses before starting.

**What if I want a propane tank?** The Building Division staff can inform you of the rules and regulations for this source of energy. Some basic regulations are: install special plumbing to pipe gas around; anchor all tanks to a concrete slab; and locate tanks at least 10 feet from a house or property line.

The power companies can tell you where to hook up.



## Building a Structure

Once again, it is important to make sure you know the General Plan and zoning designation for the property. Building uses, size, location on the lot, and design may all be affected by these codes. If you are not sure that what you intend for the property is appropriate, a Planning Specialist can assist you in research. Here are a few common questions asked before and during building:

**Who can draw the plans?** This varies with the type and complexity of the plans. Simple plans can be drawn by the property owner. Plans that are more complex, however, must be prepared by a licensed architect or engineer.

**Who can build my structure?** Basically, anyone can build your structure — you can build it yourself, have a community barn raising, or hire a licensed contractor, whichever you prefer. There are a couple of points to remember, though. According to state law, anyone working on the project needs to be covered by Workers' Compensation Insurance. Licensed contractors are responsible for themselves and all their employees. Otherwise, work is the responsibility of the property owner. Another good reason to hire professionals is that after the training and testing required to get a license, they know what they are doing. There are many small details that can trip up the beginner, and end up costing time and money.

**Do I need a Building Permit?** Most structures require a Building Permit. Only those smaller than 120 sq. ft. and not hooked up to utilities are excluded. However, even structures exempt from Building Permits must comply with all applicable codes. Check with the appropriate departments before you begin any project. Those horse stalls or firewood shelters you envision could violate code. Here are some types of projects that require Building Permits:

- New buildings
- Additions such as bedrooms, bathrooms or family rooms
- Improvements such as decks, stairs, garages, fences, fireplaces, pools and water heaters
- Electrical and plumbing systems
- Renovations such as garage conversions, basement furnishings, kitchen expansions or reroofing
- Heating, ventilating and air-conditioning systems

Every project that requires a permit has rules governing how it can be built. Be sure to check with a Building Specialist and go over the building code as you make your plans. Staff knows the process and can help you expedite the project and avoid potential pitfalls.

Building Permit application packets can be picked up at the Building Division of the Community Development office. The permit application explains what is needed from you, and a staff member can answer any questions you may have. A good tip if



you are not hiring a contractor is to write down all your ideas and questions before talking with the Building Specialists. This could prevent delays when trying to get a project done before the snow flies or your in-laws come to visit.

Everyone dreams of building his very own castle.

**I have budgeted for materials and labor; what other costs will be involved?**

Depending on the project, several types of mitigation fees must be paid and signed off prior to the issuance of a Building Permit. These include fees to the local school and fire protection districts, water and sewer hookup, and encroachment permits. Special district fees help local services keep up as their areas of service become more populated. Typical costs are around \$0.50 a square foot for fire fees, and from \$1.56 to \$1.93 a square foot for school fees, depending on where you plan to build.



Write down your questions and ideas ahead of time so you can get all the answers needed in one stop at the Community Development Department.

## Building Permits and Inspections

**How are Building Permit fees established?** Building Permit fees are based on the estimated cost of the job. They are collected to cover the costs of the application filing, the structural and nonstructural plan review, and the ongoing inspection process.

County policy requires that developers pay their own way. Otherwise, the cost would be borne by the County General Fund, and taxpayers would thus subsidize developers. Then County services such as paramedics would suffer.

**How do I set up a building inspection?**

The Building Division will provide next-day, on-site inspections with 24-hour notice. Inspections that meet code requirements will be signed off on the job-site inspection card. No work shall be concealed without Building Division approval. When all work requiring inspection is approved, a Certificate of Occupancy will be issued.

**Does a manufactured homes need a Building Permit?**

A manufactured home and/or shed must conform to Mono County codes. Be sure to check on snow loads and design review, as well as acquire a California architect or engineer's stamp. The Building staff can give you advice on requirements so you know what to ask for prior to buying. Note that additions such as foundations, porches, steps and utility trenches/lines must comply with code requirements.

## Zoning Designations

The General Plan comes into play when you want to do something with your property that is not allowed under current zoning. This could include converting a residence to a business; building a shop on the property before building the house; starting a commercial chinchilla operation; or adding on a room.

If your proposed use conflicts with uses on adjacent properties, a Conditional Use Permit, a Director Review Permit, or a



Zoning regulates personal pets as well as animals for agricultural or commercial purposes.

Variance Permit would be required (see page 5). Other uses might need a zoning change or General Plan amendment.

You may be asked to present your proposal to the Land Technical Advisory Committee (LDTAC) in a pre-application meeting. At this meeting, representatives from Planning, Public Works, Building, Code Compliance, and the Health Department can discuss the project and explain what is needed for you to proceed. For detailed explanations, approximate timelines and application procedures, contact a Planning Specialist.

## Conditional Use Permit (CUP)

A Conditional Use Permit requires Planning Commission approval that a particular use is desirable or acceptable for your location. Because the County has discretion, a CUP may be denied, or approved with conditions.

The owner first presents facts showing whether the use is consistent with the General Plan, then notifies adjacent property owners of an upcoming hearing to be conducted by the Planning Commission.

If the CUP is granted, the next owner of the property will be able to utilize it as well. Future owners, however, must comply with conditions imposed by the permit. Mandatory compliance is monitored by the Code Compliance Officer. If the conditions are not met, the Planning Commission can revoke the CUP at a public hearing.

When you are ready to apply for a CUP, ask a Planning Specialist for more details.



Starting a business in certain zoning districts could require a Conditional Use Permit.

## Director Review Permit

This procedure allows the Community Development Department Director to issue a permit for certain projects that are exempt from CEQA, noncontroversial and environmentally friendly.

Those projects that fit the qualifications will not incur the time and expense of a public hearing. And the Director will determine whether the application warrants notice to adjacent property owners.

A Director Review often decides a nonconforming use — a use that does not fit with the current zoning regulations, but legally went into effect prior to current

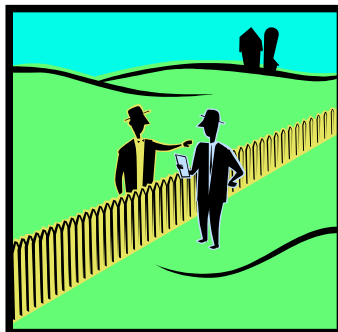
zoning ordinances. Resolving a nonconforming use can be a complicated matter, so the Department Director makes the decision.

**“For those projects that fit the qualifications, a Director Review Permit may be issued without incurring the time and expense of a public hearing.”**

## Variance Permit

A Variance Permit is granted to allow development of unusual parcels in accordance with established regulations. The justification is that the uniqueness of a particular parcel might cause undue hardship for the owner due to zoning regulations.

A Variance Permit can not allow a



A Variance Permit can help you fit your dream onto a unique lot.

non-permitted use, but can relax physical regulations such as size and setbacks.

Like a Conditional Use Permit, a Variance Permit requires a public hearing,

preceded by timely notification of adjacent property owners. This is to ensure that neighboring properties will not be negatively affected.

With a Variance Permit, the property owner can not cite excessive costs as the reason for suffering undue hardship.



# Subdivisions and Lot Line Adjustments

Dividing land into smaller pieces is covered under local ordinances and the State Subdivision Map Act. This Act gives the County the power to regulate the design and improvements of subdivisions. The Act was originally set up for engineering purposes, but has evolved so that the lead agency has input ranging from safety issues to possible rent control and design review.

Under the Subdivision Map Act, land divisions are described as minor subdivisions (two to four properties) or major subdivisions (five or more parcels). The developer of a major subdivision must prepare a detailed Tentative Map to be reviewed at a public hearing before the Planning Commission. Tentative maps generally fall under the CEQA guidelines described below. After review and comments, the tentative map may be approved with changes and conditions.

The developer must then prepare a Final Map that incorporates these changes and conditions. After review by the Planning Commission and approval by the Board of Supervisors, the Final Map is then filed with the County Clerk-Recorder. The pro-

cedure for minor subdivisions is similar, but not quite as complicated.

The purpose of the State Subdivision Map Act is to encourage orderly development and to monitor and protect the public from fraud and exploitation. To the developer, the process might seem to take an inordinate amount of time and include too many hoops to jump through. For the person who lives near a proposed subdivision, however, it is reassuring that no major development can occur without all impacted parties adding input to the process.

Another method of changing existing parcels of land is by a lot line adjustment, which moves parcel boundaries without creating a new map subject to all the regulations covered in the Subdivision Map Act. Also, the Act allows boundary lines of parcels to be shifted through a lot line adjustment as long as the result is the same number or fewer parcels. This is a more convenient and simpler way to merge two parcels, or reconfigure the shape of lots in a subdivision. The lead agency imposes fewer restrictions on a lot line adjustment as long as the setback and minimum parcel size ordinances are followed.

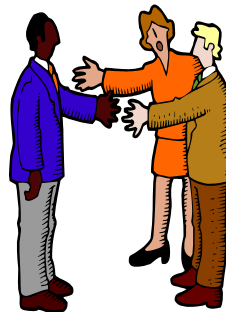
## Acronyms and Terms

In working with the Community Development Department, you might encounter some new terms. Shown below are their acronyms and definitions. For details on how they could relate to your project, ask a Planning Specialist.

- **CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act):** Basically, this California law states that projects to which it applies must undergo a prior analysis of possible environmental effects. The County will conduct an initial study to identify any such impacts. If no significant impacts are identified, a “negative declaration” is granted. Otherwise, the project requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Report.
- **EIR (Environmental Impact Report):** An EIR determines possible impacts to the environment and ways to avoid or mitigate those impacts. After a Draft EIR is issued, a 45-day review-and-comment period begins. Comments can be submitted by any interested parties, including governmental agencies. The Final EIR incorporates responses to those comments. Once the lead agency certifies the Final EIR, the project is officially approved. Because this lengthy and complicated process involves considerable time and expertise of staff, an EIR is billed to the project proponent.
- **GP (General Plan):** Each County is mandated by the State to prepare a General Plan. To quote the State General Plan Guidelines, “The role of each (county’s) general plan is to act as a ‘constitution’ for development, the foundation upon which all land use decisions are to be based. A comprehensive plan has

two major characteristics. The first is geographic; it covers a local jurisdiction’s entire planning area. Second, a comprehensive plan addresses the broad and evolving range of issues associated with a county’s development, including physical, social and economic concerns.”

- **SP (Specific Plan):** Whereas the General Plan covers the entire county, a Specific Plan spells out detailed zoning and land use regulations for one small area. An approved Specific Plan allows many types of projects without additional permits or studies.
- **UBC (Uniform Building Code):** The building regulations in the UBC form the basis for the California Building Standards Code. Local Building Specialists use these regulations as a guideline when checking your plans.



Remember, the Community Development staff is here to help you with your projects.